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# The Inspiration of the Bible

A PAPER READ BEFORE THE RURAL  
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BY

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WITH A PREFACE

BY

The Very Rev. The Dean of Ontario

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The precise meaning of the expression "The Inspiration of the Bible" is necessarily much a matter for discussion at the present time, when we are being asked to readjust our ideas as to many questions concerning Holy Writ as the result of what is called the Higher Criticism. The mechanical view, which the Church as a whole never maintained or formally bound itself to, still commends itself to some, but probably the majority even of Conservative thinkers no longer hold it in its extreme form. But when the question is asked what theory is to take its place, the answer is not easy. Many of us, who hold in the strongest possible manner the belief that the Bible is uniquely inspired, would be puzzled to give a scientific definition of what exactly we mean by the word. The article is therefore well-timed, as being a scholarly and dispassionate attempt to throw light on the question. As I understand it, the writer does not desire to advance the views of any particular School, but rather to attempt to clear the ground for even further investigation. Without therefore binding myself in any degree to the conclusions or arguments expressed therein, I have no hesitation in recommending Mr. Orchard's Essay to my brother Clergy as a stimulating and careful exposition of what he considers the proper method of approaching the question. He would, I am sure, be the last to claim to have finally disposed of it, but I know that what he has here set forth is the fruit of much study and thought and therefore thoroughly worthy of consideration.

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# The Inspiration of the Bible

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As recent events in this country have shown, religious bodies are seriously divided on the question whether the results of Higher Criticism can be accepted or must be ignored by those who believe the Bible to be the Inspired Word of God. When one has eliminated all the acrimony which, strangely enough, is often infused into such discussions, there is still left on either side the argument much that makes it difficult to arrive at a definite conclusion in a vital matter.

It is with considerable hesitation that this paper is undertaken. I have felt that, for my own part, I must know the position of affairs by reading the works of those religious leaders, who have given years to the study of the subject, and who therefore have most right to speak upon it. If by pointing out where they agree, and by stating their position of disagreement, we can arrive at some idea of the present phase of religious thought, we shall at least be in a fair way to advance with them another step towards a truer appreciation of God's workings and God's revelation of Himself.

I propose to confine myself to four distinct points :

1. The general meaning of the term Inspiration.
2. The scope of Inspiration.
3. The various phases of the Doctrine of Inspiration.
4. The analogy of the Written Word with the Incarnate Word.

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The Books referred to in the foot-notes are:

Dr. Sanday "Inspiration" (Bampton Lectures).

Dr. Watson "Inspiration"

"Lux Mundi" (edited by Bishop Gore).

Dr. Mortimer "Catholic Faith and Practice"

## The General Meaning of the Term Inspiration.

Inspiratio, *θεοπνευστία* used by Ecclesiastical writers as the process by which God delivered His Word, is clearly derived from 2 St. Tim: III. 16 *πᾶσα γραφή θεόπνευστος καὶ ὠφέλιμος* . . . . and in the Vulgate, *Omnis Scriptura Divinitus inspirata utilis est ad docendum* \* \* \* "Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable \* \* ". If we translate it in this way with R.V., with most modern and many ancient authorities, we see that St. Paul is not dogmatising on the Inspiration of the Old Testament, but merely stating the practical value given to Holy Scripture by Inspiration : and it is not too much to say with Dr. Fairbairn, that "the Inspiration of the men who read is as intrinsic and integral an element in the idea of Revelation as the Inspiration of the men who wrote." Inspiration, then, is a Divine power working in men and filling them with a knowledge of God : in His act of Inspiration God opens the eyes of men's minds to see that which He has unveiled.

We must be very careful not to confuse Inspiration with Revelation, which is another and a distinct act of God whereby He unveils that which He desires men to see. Nor again must we limit Inspiration and Revelation entirely to the Bible which is, it is true, the work of Inspiration and a record of Revelation. To do this would be to confine Inspiration to the writers of the Bible, cutting short the work of the Holy Spirit in guiding and leading us into all truth, and also it would confound the Written Word with the Incarnate Word, which is the highest form of Revelation.

With regard to Inspiration it is significant to notice a feature in the apparent method of God's workings, as St Paul puts it, "The purpose of God according to selection."<sup>1</sup> I think we may trace a gradual contraction in the field where direct Inspiration acts. First it is a nation that is inspired.

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<sup>1</sup> Romans IX-11.

God reveals Himself by means of a people, separated from the mass of mankind. As the Revelation of Himself becomes more advanced, He apparently narrows down the sphere of His Inspirative activity and inspires men who are to convey His message to His people. Then comes a long period during which the sphere of Inspiration seems to be confined to the written books, at first separate works, afterwards one book, a natural change in point of view from plurality to unity of purpose : till in the fulness of time Inspiration becomes—for once and once only—merged into Revelation, both in their highest form as the Incarnate Word. Finally, may we not say that Inspiration has its particular, individual, most strictly confined operation in the gift of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost and ever afterwards to every true believer in the promises of the Son of God ?

The character of Inspiration in this final stage is not different from that in the former stage. The Inspiration of God must be like Himself, always the same, because it is the projection of Himself. The difference lies in the receiver of it. That we should receive it was the promise of the Son, who said that the Holy Spirit should be given to us to guide us into all truth. This makes it abundantly clear that though Revelation and Inspiration reached their climax in the Son of God, Inspiration must proceed within man for the reception and assimilation of Divine knowledge and truth as revealed in God's Son. "The Inspiration of the men who read is as intrinsic and integral an element in the idea of Revelation as the Inspiration of the men who wrote."

We pass now to our second point:

### **The Scope of Inspiration.**

The Church has never defined the mode, the extent, the degree, the exact effects of Inspiration. Individual theories, at various times, have had wide acceptance, it is true, but the question seems to have been purposely left as it stands now in



our sixth Article: "That Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to Salvation and that it is of supreme authority in matters of faith." Therefore as English Churchmen we are free to assume as large a liberty as will enable us to accept any theory of Inspiration which will come within the wide limits of the above section of the sixth Article. This being so, we are left free to re-open the whole question of the scope of Inspiration.

The Bible is the only "Inspired" book that we possess; and as no independent definition of Inspiration exists, the only sound method is to study the facts presented by the Bible, and to formulate our theory of Inspiration accordingly. Unfortunately the reverse of this method has been widely used. A theory was framed, from a mistaken idea of general principles, and the Bible was made to conform with it. Now, this is the very charge we bring against the Tubingen School and other radical critics. We have our Bible to go to. We believe it to be the Inspired word of God and from it we ought at least to try and learn something of the methods God used in teaching His people and that line of study should give us an idea of the Scope of Inspiration.

Perhaps the broadest illustration of God's method is to be found in the way He allowed the knowledge of Himself to grow within the narrow limits of one people whom He chose—how He strictly forbade this nation to have any intercourse with their neighbours—how all strange peoples who stood in the way of their expansion were exterminated, and that too, by His special command. This exclusiveness was as apparent in our Lord's day, as ever before. He Himself on one occasion assumed the haughty pharisaical position when He said to the Syrophœnician woman "It is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to the dogs."<sup>1</sup> We know, of course, that this attitude was adopted to try her faith: (this in itself is an instance of His

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<sup>1</sup> St. Matthew XV-26.



method of teaching, to which reference will be made later) and we may say that the three years of our Lord's ministry were all but strictly confined to Jews and to the Jews of Palestine. And yet within a few short years, it is proved by unmistakable results that it had been the purpose of God all the while to make Himself known, in His own good time, as the God of the Gentiles. But this higher teaching, dimly, very dimly foreshadowed before, was held in reserve, and judging by the various rules of Jewish society, and the way in which the Jews invariably interpreted them, we can see that God treated them as children, adapting His revelation not merely to their weakness and childishness, but also to their religious and moral ideas.

Take an instance of moral teaching. The law of divorce contained in Deuteronomy is one of the Divine statutes and ordinances commanded by God, nevertheless it is quite plainly contrary to His mind as declared in the original institution of marriage, and in the words of our Lord, we see that God allowed this lower moral idea to be current, till men should be able to receive the higher teaching, "Moses for your hardness of heart suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it hath not been so."<sup>1</sup>

Yet another instance. God has respect to human weakness and accepts sacrificial gifts which have no value in His eyes, even as a father would accept and expect worthless or even distasteful gifts from his little child. We have only to read as far as the Psalms and the Prophets to see that the law of sacrifices, though ordained expressly by God, was only a means to an end, that the superior teaching might grow out of the inferior: that, in fact, God reveals Himself in different ways, in different ages, and that this difference is made to suit inferior intelligence and lower spirituality.

We have not the time at our disposal to multiply these instances, but I am sure that many others will occur to you.

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<sup>1</sup> St. Matthew XIX-8.

We see in every ordinance of God from the very beginning that **Divine Restraint** which seems to say in our Lord's own words: "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now."<sup>2</sup>

We have unconsciously adopted this very idea in the training of our children. We know by experience that the infant mind can only grasp one thing at a time and that thing must be on the level of the few ideas it already possesses, or at most an idea just above it, capable of making an intelligible impression when analogy is used. If, however, we go beyond his limit of intelligence, his interest is gone; or at best the most retentive infant mind will catch at an idea which it may not understand at the time, but which it will store up and bring out at some future time to startle us with its precocity.

When, with the advance of years, the boy has imbibed many false, many distorted ideas, as well as many true ones, his training becomes more difficult. It is often necessary to appeal to his distorted ideas, even to his false ones, sometimes to leave them uncorrected, and to build upon these, that truth may grow out of falseness or exaggeration. And should it be our lot to have the teaching of those who have reached manhood with minds perverted by falsehood and wrong, the difficulty is greater still. The innocence of childhood has been wiped out, the mind cannot readily grasp new ideas, and the most patient, skilful treatment is necessary. Much that is absolutely false and immoral must remain till we have worked upon some fragment of truth which lies embedded in error. The error must be left untouched till the truth has grown under our fostering care.

The Fathers of the Christian Church recognized this as the method of God at work in the Old Testament. Thus Gregory of Nazianzus, speaking of God's dealing with the Jews of old, describes how, in order to gain the co-operation of man's good will in working for his

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<sup>2</sup> St. John XVI-12.

recovery, He dealt "after the manner of a schoolmaster or a physician, and while curtailing part of their ancient customs, tolerated the rest, making some concession to their tastes, just as physicians make their medicines palatable that they may be taken by their patients. For men do not easily abandon what long custom has consecrated. Thus the first law, while it abolished their idols, tolerated their sacrifices, allowed them to be circumcised: then when once they had accepted the removal of what was taken from them, they went further and gave up what had been conceded to them—in the first case their sacrifices, in the second their practice of circumcision—and they become instead of heathens, Jews, instead of Jews, Christians, being betrayed as it were by gradual changes into acceptance of the Gospel."<sup>1</sup>

There is a further point which grows out of this. Be the pupil infant, youth or man, the idea implanted in him by his teacher is not often, we may say, never, of the same form as before it passed through his consciousness. It changes its character or point of view or particular colour as it passes through the new element of the pupil's mind. It is assimilated to the texture of the mind which grasps it and becomes practically a new idea, at least as regards the way it is presented. We are often surprised at the interpretation made by others of something we have said to them. This may be due to one of two things, either the arrangement of ideas in their mind gives a different force to our remark, or their vocabulary being different to ours, they cannot interpret the shade of meaning we intended to convey.

I have made use of an ordinary function in our daily life as a basis on which we may build up an idea of the Scope of Inspiration. First, we must remember, we took our idea from the Bible: we feel that it is an idea that pervades the whole Bible, and next, we recognize it as a general principle in con-

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<sup>1</sup> See *Lux Mundi* p. 329.



scious creation. We will not say that this last point confirms the former; we have taken it because it helps us in a very small way to understand the perfect working of it in the former.

God wills to make Himself known to man. He does not create a special race of men to convey His message. He chooses, from among those He has created, men whom He knows to be peculiarly fitted to receive the elements of divine knowledge. They had not always been worshippers of Him. Abraham, for instance, must be removed from his idolatrous surroundings: Moses was brought up as an Egyptian. Each, by his education, must have contracted many ideas quite contrary to truth and morality. Much would have to be corrected, but much, also, must be left uncorrected while the growth of truth was going on. The divine truths which they were to convey to their generation must pass through their faulty manhood and though they may have been the best of their race, their interpretation of God's will could only be made according to the limitations of their humanity. Still it was a progressive interpretation, leaving the idea of God clearer to their successors than that with which they themselves started.

Now, one very peculiar and particular limitation we must face: and that is, the clothing of their ideas in a human word, such as will convey adequate meaning to their hearers. Just as God did not create a special race of men to carry His message—so He did not create a special language to embody His truths. His people must understand His message, and (in all reverence we say it) they could only do that by use of words they understood. Words are the embodiment of ideas: by their means we are able to understand and appreciate the thought of another mind.

It is a perfectly natural desire to know the origin and growth of things we see, and the Israelites had this desire with all other peoples. There must have been,—we know there were—many traditions about the beginnings of created things, cur-

rent among the nations surrounding them. There is a wonderful similarity between these systems. As we know something about them we see that they were filled with the crudest of ideas, but there was enough of truth in them to be used. And when we compare that given in the early chapters of Genesis with those of the Assyro-Babylonian peoples, we can trace the similarity, but we are more impressed with the new features, of which roughly speaking there are three.

1. The one true God, the God of the Israelites, is supreme as the Creator.

2. All things created are, in their essence, good.

3. Man has a special relation to God, who gives him hope and promise.

Now, nothing but Inspiration could have made this change. God inspired the writer to perceive these great truths, the only essential truths : but they had to pass through the writer's mind, had to be assimilated to other ideas in his mind and last of all had to be embodied in words representing things that he knew. That is the perfectly natural explanation why we have not an account as scientific as would be written to-day. But the Inspiration of that account is none the less evident.

Within our idea of the scope of Inspiration it is all the more evident as coming from a man, who could not have originated the ideas in his heathen surroundings. Humanly speaking, the truth, as we have it now, could not have been written down in words existing then, any more than the truth which we shall have in future ages could be adequately expressed in ideas and words that exist now.

In conclusion then of this second point, we may say that the Scope of Inspiration lies within the limits of man's power to express the truth that has been revealed to him. He has but a limited stock of ideas, and only such words to express them as have already been used to describe old ideas. His share in the general flow of divine movement is like the small tributary that

enters the great river of communicated knowledge: his stream of words has gathered much from the various soils it has passed over, and particles of these remain in solution and cloud the full, deep meaning of that truth which God gave him.

We may say, also, that the scope of the Inspiration of the Bible lies within the limits of the Spiritual and Moral Kingdoms. This is the sphere of God's saving grace. Mere intellectual knowledge and scientific research have nothing to do with the eternal salvation of a people or a man. The faculties employed in such activities may—we would rather say—must be used in the service of religion, but a knowledge of God that leads men into the way of salvation and keeps him there, can, as the Bible undoubtedly shows, exist quite apart from any specific or even fragmentary human knowledge.

It will be helpful now, as our third point, to examine

### **The History of the Doctrine**

and look at the various phases through which it has passed.

Up to 50 years ago one theory held the field and had all the prestige which antiquity can give it. Stated briefly it was this: The various writers of the Holy Scriptures were the pens, not the penmen of God; they copied down with pen, ink and paper what was dictated to them by the Divine Spirit; it was a mechanical operation, suspending the exercise of human thought and ensuring the direct inspiration of every word. We should expect no less rigid a theory from a generation inheriting the ideas of an early civilization, and largely influenced by Platonic philosophy. We can trace its entry into the Church through Philo, who upheld Plato's theory that when the Divine element comes into a man, the human must go out to make room for it. For instance, to Philo there was nothing superfluous in the Law: every little word is absolutely necessary. That he uses the LXX rather than the Hebrew does not weaken his contention, for he upheld in its most extravagant form the story of Aristeas describing the miraculous way in which the



LXX translation was made.

In support of this verbal accuracy are often quoted our Lord's words: "Till Heaven and Earth pass away, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law till all things be accomplished."<sup>1</sup> But the context of these words makes it clear that it was not Scripture as Scripture which He had in view; for He remarks almost immediately after, "Ye have heard what was said to them of old time...\*...but I say unto you."<sup>2</sup> In fact, He Himself proceeds to repeal commandments of the law, that His own better principles may be instilled.

There is really no support for this plenary verbal inspiration to be found in the Bible, while everywhere therein we find reasons against it: errors in grammar, imperfections of style, discrepancies between one part and another. One has only to examine the quotations from the Old Testament in the New Testament to see that if St. Paul, for instance, believed in the full value of every single word, he was either very irreverent in making such copious changes as he does, or he had access to a text of the Hebrew and LXX which we have not now. In the latter case, it seems strange that, if every single word of his text was indispensable, it has not been allowed to survive in its original form.

With regard to this theory Dr. Sanday points out the great difficulty presented to those who hold it. An examination of the documents themselves reveals an unevenness in the character of their Inspiration. In both Old Testament and New Testament, there are, on the one hand, books where the presence of the gift is as clear as the sun at noon-day, while on the other, there are books where there is not evident the same strength of faith or perfect historical method and accuracy as in the other class. In fact there seems to be a maximum and a minimum degree of Inspiration.<sup>3</sup> How can we account for this, if we re-

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<sup>1</sup> St. Matthew v-18.

<sup>2</sup> St. Matthew v-27-28.

<sup>3</sup> See Sanday pp. 397-9.

move the human element entirely from their composition and ascribe every detail of thought and word and arrangement in all the books to the same Divine Spirit uninterpreted by different minds? The Jews themselves observed the different values of their books, and as they divided them into three classes according to their subject matter, so they supposed there were three degrees of Inspiration.

This is another phase of the doctrine which has been held at different times—by the Jewish Rabbis, the Schoolmen and some modern writers. They have held that there are different degrees of Inspiration and have proceeded to do what is well-nigh impossible; to classify the books and even parts of books. In some, they say, the Holy Spirit suggests and dictates minutely; in some, He only directs, leaving the human mind to describe and arrange; in others, He elevates the strength and vigour of the human mind above its natural sphere: in others, again, He only superintends the work and preserves a human record from blemishes.

There seems to be a large element of truth in this theory, but its general force is weakened by the fact that it proves, or attempts to explain, too much. While it is far more satisfactory than the “mechanical theory” and is a great step in what is now generally believed to be the right direction, yet it comes to us with all the faults of its adherents—the Rabbis and the Schoolmen.

Yet another phase can be traced from very early times, and it re-appeared in Europe during the 15th, 16th and 17th centuries. It has been called the Dynamical Theory. St. Augustine’s words, describing the Inspiration of St. John in writing his Gospel, fitly define this form, “*Inspiratus a Deo, sed tamen homo.*”<sup>1</sup> He is a man chosen by God as eminently fitted for the work of bearing record. He is inspired by God, but retains his human faculties. The teaching of Christ was not projected

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<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine in Joann: I-i-1.

supernaturally upon his mind and then committed to writing, but he had lived in the closest possible relations with our Lord, and had, for three years, daily received His teaching until his mind had become endued with a spirituality which would faithfully and sympathetically interpret the truth he had received. His mind had been cleansed, strengthened and employed by the Divine author, but in the transmission of Divine Truth his humanity made possible the existence of imperfections and weaknesses in his writings.

This is a typical instance of that kind of Inspiration which Augustine attributed to the Bible. Each author wrote "*ut quisque meminerat et ut cuique cordi erat*," and a similar theory was held by Erasmus, Baxter and Paley, who have elaborated the idea into such a form of Inspiration as secures accuracy in all matters of conduct and doctrine, but does not necessitate complete accuracy in other particulars.

In reviewing all these phases of the Doctrine we cannot help being struck with a feature common to all of them. They are obviously framed to meet objections raised either within or outside the Church. They explain more or less satisfactorily how discrepancies and weaknesses and inaccuracies can occur in an Inspired book; but the results obtained, at any rate as far as the nature of Inspiration is concerned, are negative. Their mistake seems to lie in the method pursued. The last two phases, at least, were arrived at from a study of the various books, and ample evidence is contained therein to confidently affirm their Inspiration.

But the nature and character of a being, whether human or divine can only be truly estimated after a study of all the activities of that being, and that form of Inspiration which was given to chosen men for recording the Revelation of God is only one activity of the Holy Spirit. To gain a true idea of Inspiration it is necessary to observe the Holy Spirit at work in other ways.



Bishop Gore has pursued this method in his famous essay, and I will briefly enumerate the four points he makes with regard to the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church.<sup>1</sup>

1. The Holy Spirit treats man as a "social" being. Just as from the very beginning the Jew received the promises because he was a member of the Jewish race into which he was initiated after birth by circumcision, so from the beginnings of Christian life, a man was understood to become a Christian and receive the benefits of redemption by no other means than incorporation into the Christian society.

2. The Spirit nourishes individuality. He gives us an intenser life, by which religion in general and Christianity in particular has always been propagated; and this intenser life is the product of right instincts, right affections, at first instilled into the mind by authority and afterwards acting spontaneously.

3. The Holy Spirit claims the whole of nature for itself and consecrates it. Everything in Christianity is realised "in flesh as in spirit." The spiritual is not the immaterial, for we become spiritual not by any change or curtailment of nature, not by any depreciation or ignoring of the body. The material and the spiritual are to be one, as the "Word made flesh" has revealed and perpetuated.

4. The Spirit's method in recovering the world from sin is a gradual process. He lifts man by little and little. He condescends to man's infirmity; He puts up with him as he is, if only He can at last bring him back to God.

Then Dr. Gore proceeds to deal with the relation between the Bible and the Church. "It is," he says "becoming more and more difficult to believe in the Bible, without believing in the Church." We may say of all the books of the Bible, that they were written as occasion required, within the Church and for the Church. They presuppose membership in it and familiarity with its tradition. They are secondary, not primary instructors: for edification, not for initiation. The Scripture was regarded by

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<sup>1</sup> See *Lux Mundi* pp. 322-8.

the early Church as the highest utterance of the Spirit, the unique and constant test of the Church's life and teaching; but the Spirit in the Church interpreted the meaning of Scripture.<sup>1</sup>

From these general points and comprehensive remarks upon the work of the Holy Spirit in the Church, we can construct a few affirmations regarding the nature and character of Inspiration.

1. The Inspired work of a writer in the Bible is a voice from the Church of his time. He is under the influence of the Holy Spirit, and stands out above the other members of his Church, whether Jewish or Christian, as a chosen vessel, to hold the truth and distribute it among the body of believers. His work is not so much to record and interpret as to stir and keep alive in the Church the energizing influence of the Holy Spirit. He is the human agent of the Divine power which chooses to work among men by means of men.

2. We see that Inspiration is primarily a spiritual gift and only secondarily a mental one. The individuality of the writer must come out, for the Holy Spirit possesses the man, and Inspiration acts upon him without changing his true character. It elevates his aim and directs his special qualities into their right channel. Intensity of purpose has always been accompanied in man by mental and physical limitations.

3. But the human weaknesses of the Written Word, as representing the limitations of the human writer are, as it seems, not merely tolerated by the Divine Spirit, but positively welcomed by Him as an evidence of man's struggle towards spiritual freedom. One purpose in creation may not irreverently be said to be the desire of God to draw the whole of nature to Himself. Each part of man is to be cleansed and strengthened that it may take its proper place in his real being, "that the man of God

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<sup>1</sup> See *Lux Mundi* pp. 338-9.

may be complete;"<sup>1</sup> and no member or passion or feeling must be atrophied through want of use any more than it may be allowed to work ruin by abuse. "The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now \* \* waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body."<sup>2</sup> Those who would annihilate the material side of their nature have forgotten the presence of Christ's perfect Manhood at the right hand of God.

4. Because God is waiting to receive our perfected manhood at the last, the gradual training and growing knowledge we perceive in the Inspired writers are sure marks of the Spirit's presence. They are the signs of His work, which through thousands of years of patient pleading and guiding lead up to the coming of the Incarnate Word. Though the Revelation of God given to us in the Gospels is fuller, deeper, broader far than that which was given to the Jews—in the Psalms, for instance—nothing is taken away from the Jewish writings, not even those revengeful words which seem to us to mar the spiritual beauty of the whole book. Nothing has been taken away, but something has been added: the fulness of truth in the writings, the fulness of grace in the individual. Therein we see the analogy that exists between the Written Word and the Incarnate Word, who was full of grace and truth.

Just as the body which He has taken with Him into the Heavens is the same and yet not the same as that which hung upon the Cross and was laid in the Tomb, just as that body of ours by which we shall be recognized on the Resurrection morning is the same and yet not the same as that which so feebly struggles here, so the Inspired Scriptures will not pass away but will remain the same, with all the human blemishes, all the marks of character which we distinguish and recognize, which

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<sup>1</sup> 2 Timothy III-17-RV. the words immediately following "Every Scripture inspired of God is also profitable ..... for instruction which is in righteousness."

<sup>2</sup> Romans VIII-22.



also we feel God recognizes and even welcomes in the Written Word, like the stamp of character He will look for in the persons of His redeemed.

We have gradually passed into the consideration of our fourth point.

### **The Analogy of the Written Word with the Incarnate Word.**

“The Spirit of Life”—to use St. Paul’s phrase—has from the very beginning, carried on His distinctive work in creation—not to create, but to evolve order from chaos, and breathe life into lifeless matter. He it was who brooded over the face of the waters. As the “Finger of God” He moulded and finished off in detail the designs of the Godhead. It was He who prepared the way for the Incarnation. It is He who fashions the character and the destiny both of nature and of individual men in such a way as to conduce to the glory of Christ, who is the object and purpose of all. It was His especial mission to take of the substance of the Blessed Virgin, to overshadow her, and to generate “the Word that was made flesh.”

And “where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.” (2 Cor. III. 17.)—to quote St. Paul again. In all His life-giving operations He does not create, He inspires and reorganises, He transforms and quickens. So it is that He takes the thoughts and words of men, ancient traditions, family narratives, national records, words of human wisdom, laws and institutions—things in themselves temporary and partial—and makes them into the everlasting word of God. So the written word of God was produced by the Inspiration of the same Holy Spirit, acting upon the wills and minds of chosen men.

It seems to me that because due consideration has not been given to the close analogy existing between the Written Word and the Incarnate Word, the two great errors which in one case tried to minimise Christ’s Humanity, and in the other to

minimise His Divinity, have been extended to the Written Word. The problem of Inspiration involves the solution of the problem of the Incarnation—the co-existence of the Finite and the Infinite. The presence of our Lord on earth in finite time has solved the one problem and we know that God and man can fully co-operate together, as they did in the person of Jesus Christ, who had all divine and all human attributes—Perfect God and Perfect Man.

The teaching of history should guard us against removing the human element from the Written Word, just as it establishes our deepest faith in the Inspiration of the Scriptures, their divine element.

The Written Word is in the nature of a Sacrament. Its human, outward form and its divine, inward Inspiration make up one complete whole. That which we can see and understand is not exclusively human and that which it reveals to us of God is not exclusively divine. Yet there is no confusion of substance; for we can discern in the Written Word, only less clearly than in the Incarnate Word, the properties of God and the properties of man, and we must accept to the fullest extent and in their fullest consequences as well, those facts which manifest to us the ignorance and weakness of man, as well as those which manifest the wisdom and power of God.

The Written Word is a ζῶον ἐμψύχον not a dead mechanical record, but a living, vital organism, with life-giving power. The Spirit of Life took of the substance of man's mind, overshadowed it and generated and quickened that which comes to us now as our Bible. Its various parts developed as the Church needed them. "Being a body, its members are not all equal. Some are fuller of life, some have a greater beauty, some a wider usefulness. Some we could lose without overpowering loss; some on the other hand, are essential to the life of the whole. The Old Testament dies if cut off from the New. The Epistles lose all their power if the Gospels are taken away."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Watson p-213.

And all these members are knit together and controlled by one Central Intelligence, the Spirit of God who generated them, who is the life-giving power of the whole. It is He who inspires the devout reader. He it is whom Christ gave to His Church to lead it into all truth, to take of the glory of Christ, as revealed in every part of the Bible and show it unto us.

As that which embodies the truth, the Written Word has been attacked in the same way as the Jews sought to kill Christ, "a man that hath told you the truth:"<sup>1</sup> but like the Incarnate Word, the Written Word is triumphant over assault. It passes through the midst of its enemies unscathed and continues its life-giving work in the Church for the final redemption of all mankind.

But enquiry and investigation and research in the Written Word by devout minds are not attacks. The Incarnate Word Himself said: "I have many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now;"<sup>2</sup> and we may well believe that truths which are now coming out about the nature of the Bible were potentially, at least, included among the "many things" referred to by the Saviour. The anxious enquirer who had faith in Christ was not treated by Him as an enemy: on the contrary, he was instructed patiently, and nearly always in a very significant way. Our Lord submitted another question, to draw out, if possible, the truth from the man himself: and failing this, to extract the man's idea of the truth and then to correct and amplify it.

For example, St. Peter's affirmation that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God, was in answer to Christ's repeated question.<sup>3</sup> On another occasion He asks St. Peter's opinion "What thinkest thou, Simon?"<sup>4</sup> and the disciple's natural perception seizes on the truth. These are only two, among many instances of the way in which Christ used the human in-

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<sup>1</sup> St. John VIII-40.

<sup>2</sup> St. John XVI-12.

<sup>3</sup> St. Matthew XVI-13-16.

<sup>4</sup> St. Matthew XVII-25.

telligence of His disciples to express or outline divine truths. It was merely the Socratic method in its perfection, practised by a greater than Socrates. It is, in fact, a critical method, sanctioned by Christ Himself. Who then will deny not only the usefulness but also the necessity of it for intelligent enquirers of the Written Word, provided it is practised in a devout and humble spirit?

Like the Incarnate Word, the Written Word is a living teacher, who answers our questions, suggests others for our intelligence to answer, and amplifies and corrects our imperfect notions of divine things. But we must be very careful not to presume on our position like St. Peter did. "Then Peter took him and began to rebuke him"—to deny a truth Christ has just outlined—but He turned and said unto Peter, "Get thee behind me, Satan, thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men."<sup>1</sup> A terrible warning to those who study the word of God in any other way than as a devout and humble learner.

Lastly, the analogy holds closer than ever in the complete sufficiency of both the Incarnate Word and the Written Word for every living soul. It matters not who came to Christ for teaching, advice or consolation, whether the enquirer was a master of the Jews, a lawyer, an ignorant fisherman, or a degraded publican, every devout learner was drawn towards the Incarnate Word and received from Him just what his doubts or trials or sorrows needed.

So with the Written Word, no mind however intellectual, however simple, as long as it is coupled with a believing heart, can turn its pages and fail to make its truths his own, for

"All the lore its scholars need  
are "pure eyes and Christian hearts."

In conclusion we may say that an attitude towards the Bible such as we have adopted is more in accordance with the

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1 St. Matthew XVI-22-23.



results of a devout study of it than the so-called traditional attitude. It gives play to reason, but keeps it within bounds by faith. It does not assume any primal antagonism between the two. We believe that the truths of the Bible have in this way become more accessible, because our human nature no less than our spiritual nature is brought more into touch with it. We know that the Holy Spirit claims the whole of nature for itself and consecrates it. Everything in Christianity is realized "in flesh as in spirit." The spiritual is not the immaterial; for the material and the spiritual are to be one as "the word made flesh" has revealed and perpetuated. And by this attitude we gain an unassailable position. We have nothing to fear from the destructive critic: "Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul."<sup>1</sup> The soul of the Bible, its Inspiration, has irrefutable evidence in history and in human experience.

"It is said that in 1863, in the American Civil War, when Fort Sumter was bombarded by Federal warships and the fortifications were rapidly reduced to ruins, it seemed as though the fort must soon surrender. But the more the walls were battered down, the stronger the fortress became, and when the fortifications had been practically demolished by bombardment the fort was impregnable."<sup>2</sup>

The defences set up, at different periods, to protect the Bible and invest it with an authority outside itself, have been in accordance with God's plan. At an age when it was impossible to discriminate between the divine and the man, they were necessary, or the divine and the human would have fallen together.

The Rabbis hedged round and fenced in the Law with an elaborate ritual and tradition; but when our Lord came, He pointed out, not only its weakness as a defence, but also its danger to the Church itself. Other defences have from time

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<sup>1</sup> St. Matthew X-28.

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Mortimer vol. II.-p.231.

to time, been arbitrarily erected: but it is not in these that we must trust, neither must we be dismayed when they break down. The strength of the Bible lies in its natural position, which is unassailable. As the living organism which has grown up and is energized by the direct influence of the Holy Spirit, who chooses to work amongst men by means of men, it remains, after every fresh attack has been delivered, and when each new light is thrown upon it,

“The Impregnable Rock of Holy Scripture.”



